

Chloe Mae Sheppard Shaw  
Lake Washington Girls Middle School  
Grade: 8  
Age: 14

Second Place Winner

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." Martin Luther King Jr. wrote this quote while being victimized and stifled inside of Birmingham jail. Letters from Birmingham Jail is one of MLK's most famous written works. Even while being incarcerated, he was able to produce an amazingly powerful quote. Even though this quotation is 49 years old, it is not only relevant today, but can be applied to many injustices in American culture, such as gay rights and immigration.

The Civil Rights movement took place from 1955 to 1968. It was a war inside of America itself, a war against injustice, inequality, and segregation. Martin Luther King Jr. became the leader of the Civil Rights Movement, spearheading events such as the Montgomery bus boycott, non-violent sit ins, and marches across the south. He wrote Letters from Birmingham jail while being jailed for his participation in the Birmingham civil rights campaign in 1963. Birmingham was the richest of Alabama's cities, and the base of segregation for the south. While participating in a non-violent protest, MLK was jailed. He received a letter from other African American activists and clergymen saying that Dr. King was out of line. He was an "outside agitator", stirring the pot and challenging America's ways. They told him that he should handle his own problems in Montgomery. Thus, he wrote a reply stating, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." MLK goal extended far beyond only city. He aspired to free all of America from the grips of racism, and this quote illustrates his intentions very clearly. Even now, sixty years later, America is ridden with injustice.

Issues of racial equality relate to the gay rights movement. Emmett Till's murder in 1955 kick started the Civil Rights Movement because of it's sheer heinousness. Matthew Shepard's story is similar. Both boys were beaten and murdered, Emmett Till because of his race, and Matthew Shepard because of his sexuality. After Shepard's murder, the men guilty were put in jail, each with two consecutive life sentences. But for Till, his murderers walked free. Matthew Shepard's murder brought to light the injustice done to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender citizens, and the Matthew Shepard Hate Crime Act was passed because people knew that the injustice done to Matthew Shepard would ripple throughout America. Emmett Till became a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Both murders caused movements and laws that attempt to rid America of injustice. People saw what intolerance had caused the young boys, and sought to bring an end to it. Even people outside of the LGBTQ community believed in fighting homophobia. Even people outside of the African American community believe in fighting racism. They saw that if America is going to change, then they would have to work hard, and make sure that injustice is rooted out. Because injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Another area where MLK's quote rings true is in America's view of immigration. Countless undocumented immigrants that passed through the borders between the U.S and Mexico work at minimum wage jobs, have their families torn apart, and their fundamental human rights are taken away. The poverty in Mexico and other Latin American countries is so extreme that some risk their lives just to travel across the border to work at the least wanted jobs, and once in the United States, get treated

poorly. The injustice is that these people come to America looking for a better future and are treated with disdain, paid minimum wages, suffer poor working conditions, and are denied citizenship when all they are looking for is a better future. Most people turn a blind eye when immigrants are doing back breaking work, but when any immigrants try to become successful, or try to better their lives, people start talking about illegal aliens and how they're "ruining America". If America, the self professed leader of the free world, is unwilling to confront and solve injustice within it's own borders than we have no right to criticize other countries inability to solve problems. Martin Luther King didn't only solve problems with action, but with compassion. The fact that America is comfortable with tearing families apart is astonishing. America not only needs to address these problems with conviction, but also with compassion. If America solves problems with humanity, then the U.S may be able to stop injustice within our own boundaries. Even if you are not an immigrant, you should still be able to fight for their cause.

Even though MLK's words are over 40 years old, they are still, if not more, relevant today. While the injustices may have shifted, these problems still need to be addressed. Dr. King would never let injustice against anyone no matter who, be persecuted. Imagine how many more problems would've been solved if MLK had been alive for a few more years. We will just have to finish his work for him, and make sure that no one, no matter their sexuality, heritage, race, or background is treated with injustice. Thank you Dr. King for making the way to justice just a little bit easier.

Luther King, Martin, Jr. *Letters from Birmingham Jail*. N.p.: n.p., 1963. Print.

""Letter from Birmingham City Jail" Essay | "Letter from Birmingham City Jail""*BookRags*.  
BookRags, n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.bookrags.com/essay-2005/11/10/191816/22/>>.